

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Public Health Crisis Broadens as Fentanyl is Added to Other Drugs

The opioid crisis continues to grow as the combining of drugs causes more overdose fatalities. Opioid misuse is complicated by a powerful drug fentanyl, which is frequently added to heroin unbeknownst to the user. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid often used as a pain medication. It can be up to 100 times more potent than morphine and many times more powerful than heroin. Public health officials are now seeing cocaine contaminated with fentanyl, a fairly new phenomenon, and many cocaine users are not aware of it, or the potential danger. “From a harm reduction perspective, we want people to know that when they buy cocaine (or other drugs), they may be getting a lethal dose of fentanyl with it” says Dr. Maura J. Rossman, Howard County Health Officer. “We hope that by cautioning users, we may be able to save lives”, she adds.

Recently, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Dr. Robert Redfield, Jr., spoke out on the subject, indicating that his son nearly died from taking the deadly combination. In Maryland, an increase in cocaine-related deaths is largely the result of deaths occurring in combination with opioids. Fifty-five percent of cocaine-related deaths in 2016 occurred in combination with fentanyl (Maryland Annual Drug Intoxication Report 2016). Over the last year, Howard County has seen a 50% rise in overdose deaths where only fentanyl was involved according to Howard County Police Department statistics.

If you or someone you know suffers from substance use disorder, there are resources available. In Howard County, Grassroots Crisis Hotline is available 24/7 by calling 410-531-6677. Walk-in hours are 7:00 am – 7:00 pm, seven days a week. The Howard County Health Department provides resources and referrals by calling 410-313-6202 or by visiting the website at www.hchealth.org.

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